



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

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### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

#### INTRODUCTION

Safety from physical attack, harassment or other forms of aggression or abuse is central to a person's sense of well-being and is closely associated with fundamental notions of human rights. Physical injury and psychological trauma from attempted, threatened or actual incidents of violence can have major consequences for the lives of victims and can generate a substantial burden on families and the broader community in providing support for victims. It is for these reasons that an understanding of the nature and extent of violence and of means for minimising violent behaviours are issues of major public concern.

Violence in society takes many forms. Men, women and children can all be victims, as well as perpetrators of violence. In recent years violence against women has been a particular concern of governments, community groups and women themselves.

The 1996 Womens Safety Survey measured the incidences of physical and sexual violence against women over the 12 months of 1996. The following definitions were used in the Womens Safety Survey:

Violence is any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault which occurred since the age of 15.

Physical assault is use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten a woman.

Sexual assault is any act of a sexual nature carried out against a woman's will through the use of physical force, intimidation or coercion, or any attempts to do this.

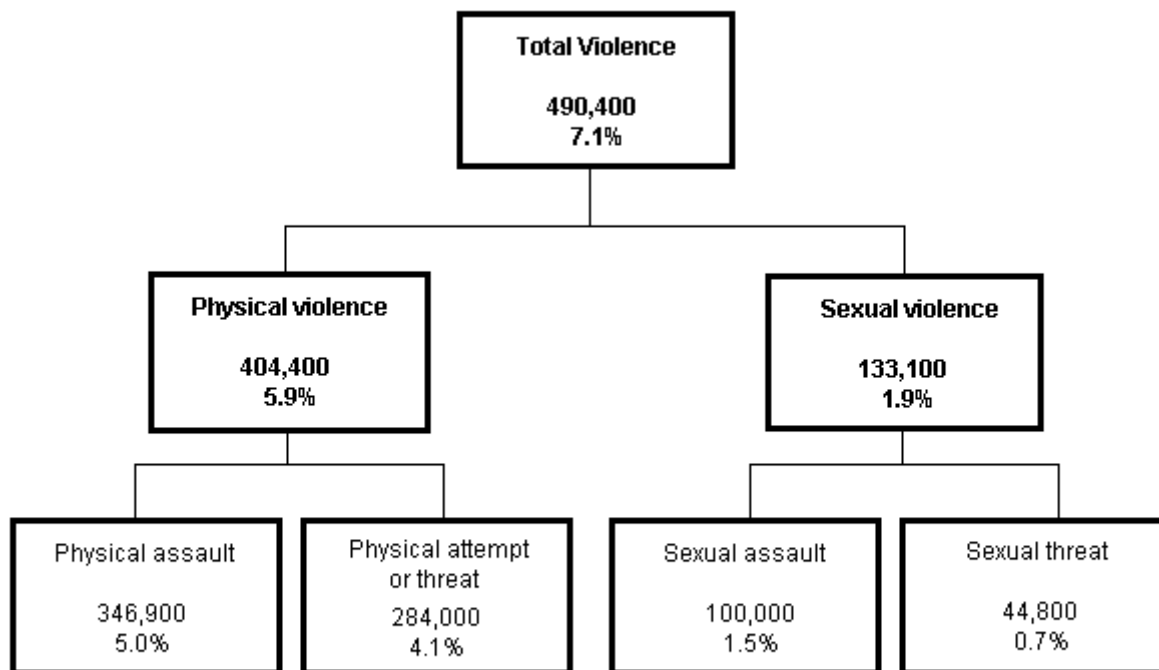
Threats are included only if a woman believes they are able and likely to be carried out.

These definitions are based on actions which would be considered as criminal offences under State and Territory criminal law.

#### MAIN FINDINGS

During the 12 months prior to the survey 7% of women experienced an incident of violence. Although small in percentage terms, this corresponds to a sizeable number of women, 490,400 (table S3.1). Women were more likely to experience physical violence than sexual violence (6% compared with 2%). However, 47,100 women had experienced physical and sexual violence on separate occasions. Women were nearly four times more likely to experience violence by a man than by a woman. 22% of women who experienced violence (109,100) reported incidents by more than one perpetrator in the previous 12 months.

### S3.1 WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE(a) DURING THE LAST 12 MONTHS, 1996



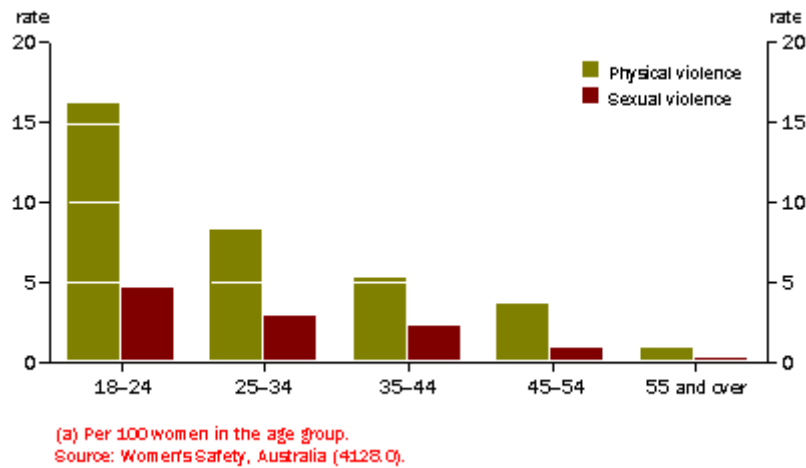
(a) A women could have experienced both physical and sexual violence, as well as both assault and threat. The components when added may therefore be larger than the total.

Source: Women's Safety, Australia (4128.0).

### AGE

Younger women are more at risk of violence than older women. 19% of women aged 18-24 had experienced one or more incidents of violence in the previous twelve-month period compared to 7% of women aged 35-44 and 1.2% of women aged 55 and over (see graph S3.2). The same pattern is evident for both physical and sexual violence. However, the decline with age is greater for physical violence than for sexual violence. Women who experienced violence by women tended on average to be younger than those who experienced violence by men. 46% of women reporting violence by women were aged 18-24 years compared to 36% of those reporting violence by men.

### S3.2 WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE DURING THE LAST 12 MONTHS, 1996

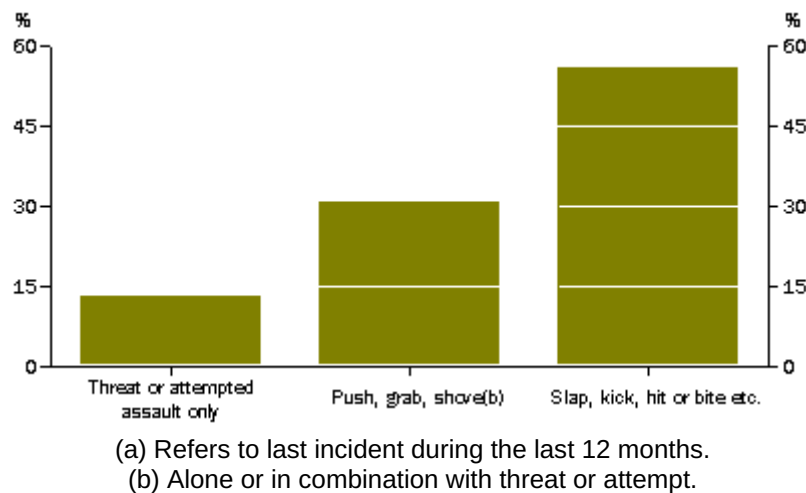


## PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Incidents of physical violence may involve one or more actions on the part of the perpetrator. The Womens Safety Survey classified the nature of physical violence on the basis of these actions in the last incident.

As graph S3.3 shows, of the 338,700 women who experienced physical violence by a man in the previous 12 month period, 13% experienced a threat or attempt only and a further 31% were pushed, grabbed or shoved, whether or not in conjunction with threats or attempts. The remaining incidents (56%) involved more serious actions such as hitting, slapping, punching or beating, which may also have been in conjunction with pushing, grabbing, shoving or threatening.

**S3.3 PHYSICAL VIOLENCE BY A MAN(a), 1996**



Source: Women's Safety, Australia (4128.0).

The severity of violence can also be assessed from injuries sustained. Of those women who had been assaulted by a man in the previous 12 month period, 48% who were physically assaulted, and 22% who were sexually assaulted, were injured in the last incident. The most common injuries were bruises, cuts and scratches. While a sexual assault had to involve force, this may have been physical force or coercion, including the threat of physical harm to the woman or her children

## MARITAL STATUS AND RELATIONSHIP TO PERPETRATOR

Perhaps because of their different ages and life styles, women who were married or in a defacto relationship were less likely to experience (or report experiencing) violence by a man than those who were not married. 4% of women with a current partner experienced violence by either their partner or another man in the previous twelve-month period, compared to 10% of women who were not married (see table S3.4). This pattern was observed for both physical and sexual violence.

### S3.4 VIOLENCE BY A MAN(a), 1996

Relationship to perpetrator	Married/defacto rate(b)	Not married rate(b)	Total rate(b)
Current partner	2.6	. .	2.6
Previous partner	* *	4.8	3.3
Other known man	1.0	3.4	1.9
Stranger	0.7	3.0	1.5
<b>Total(c)</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>6.2</b>

(a) During the last 12 months.

(b) Rate per 100 women in the relevant population.

(c) If a woman experienced violence by more than one male perpetrator, she was only counted once in the total.

Source: Women's Safety, Australia (4128.0).

The likelihood of a woman experiencing violence, by someone she knows or a stranger, also differed according to whether or not she had a partner. Women who were married or in a de facto relationship were more likely to have experienced violence by their partner than by another man known to them or by a stranger. Among women who were not married, those most at risk of violence were women who had a previous partner. Of these women 5% experienced violence from their previous partner in the previous 12 month period.

Women who were not married were also at least three times more likely to have experienced physical or sexual violence from strangers and men known to them, than women with a current partner.

## PARTNER VIOLENCE

Of women who have ever been married or in a de facto relationship, 23% experienced violence by a partner at some time during or following the relationship. Women were considerably more likely to have experienced violence in a past than a current relationship (42% compared to 8%). Three quarters of the women who experienced violence by their current partner reported that it had occurred only once or rarely (262,700) compared to approximately 40% of women who had experienced violence from a previous partner. Notwithstanding this, of women who reported violence from their current partner at some stage in the relationship, 12% (41,700) said that they currently lived in fear.

In addition to information about the occurrence of violence, the survey also collected information about emotional abuse a woman may have experienced by her partner. Of all women in a current relationship, 9% reported some form of emotional abuse, which was defined as manipulation, isolation or intimidation. Women who experienced violence from their partner were significantly more likely to experience emotional abuse than those who had not (59% compared to 4%).

Pregnancy is a time when women may be vulnerable to abuse. Of those women who

experienced violence by a previous partner, 701,200 had been pregnant at some time during their relationship. While 42% of these women experienced violence during the pregnancy (292,100), 20% experienced violence for the first time while they were pregnant.

There were 483,700 women who separated from a previous partner who had been violent to them, and who subsequently returned to that partner. During the time they were separated, 35% of these women experienced violence by their partner. Half of the women who experienced violence by a previous partner finally ended their relationship because of the violence they experienced or because of threats against their children.

## CHILDREN WITNESSING VIOLENCE

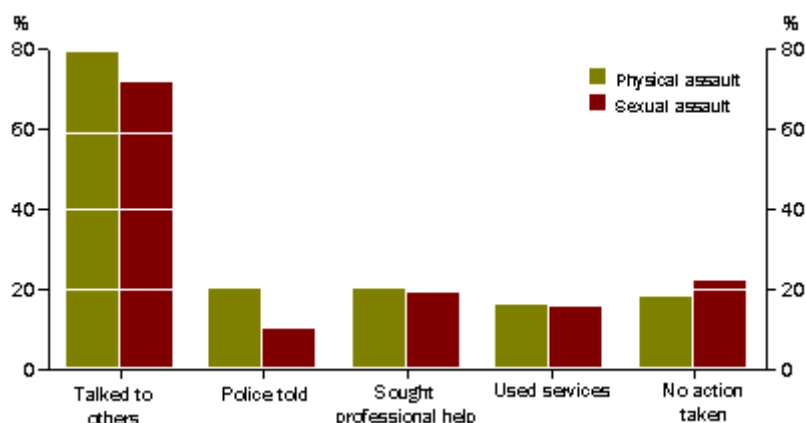
Violence which occurs between partners in a home may affect the children who also live in the home. 61% (211,600) of women who experienced violence by a current partner reported that they had children in their care at some time during the relationship, and 38% (132,400) said that these children had witnessed the violence. 46% of women who experienced violence by a previous partner said that children in their care had witnessed the violence.

## ACTIONS TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE

There is a range of actions that a woman can take as a result of an incident of violence, including: contacting the police; seeking advice or support from a professional, such as a doctor, counsellor or minister of religion; contacting a service provider for crisis, legal or financial assistance; or speaking to other people, such as family and friends.

Overwhelmingly, the main action taken after experiencing an assault by a man was talking to other people, particularly family and friends. 79% of women who were physically assaulted by a man since the age of 15, and 72% who were sexually assaulted, discussed their last experience with family, friends or others (see graph S3.5). Women were more likely to contact a crisis service about sexual assault than physical assault (11% compared to 6%) although the rate of contact was low for both. The pattern was similar among women who experienced incidents of physical and sexual assault in the previous 12 month period.

### S3.5 ACTIONS TAKEN BY WOMEN AFTER EXPERIENCING ASSAULT(a) BY A MAN, 1996



(a) Refers to last incident experienced since the age of 15 years. Excludes women whose last incident occurred more than 20 years ago.

Source: Women's Safety, Australia (4128.0).

## REPORTING TO THE POLICE

Of women who experienced a physical assault by a man in the previous twelve-month period, 54,400 (19%) said they reported the last incident to the police, as did 14,700 (15%) of women who were sexually assaulted.

One-fifth of women who had experienced an incident of physical assault by a man since the age of 15 had reported the last incident to the police (302,300), as did one-tenth of women who were sexually assaulted (75,500) (see table S3.6). A small proportion of incidents were reported to the police by somebody else.

Women were more likely to report incidents that were perpetrated by a stranger than by somebody they knew. Of women whose last incident of assault was by a stranger, 35% who were physically assaulted and 25% who were sexually assaulted reported the incident to the police. Women who were physically assaulted by a current partner were least likely to have reported the incident (5%).

### **S3.6 WOMEN WHO REPORTED THE LAST INCIDENT OF ASSAULT(a) BY A MAN TO THE POLICE, 1996**

Relationship to perpetrator	Physical assault		Sexual assault	
	'000	rate(b)	'000	rate(b)
Current partner	*12.9	*5.1	* *	* *
Previous partner	163.9	24.2	29.4	16.6
Boyfriend/date	*14.7	*9.5	*7.7	*3.6
Other known man	51.1	21.3	*17.5	*6.7
Stranger	59.7	34.7	*20.9	*24.5
<b>Total(c)</b>	<b>302.3</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>75.5</b>	<b>9.8</b>

(a) Since the age of 15 years. Excludes women whose last incident occurred more than 20 years ago.

(b) Rate per 100 women who experienced assault by the perpetrator group.

(c) If a woman experienced assault by more than one male perpetrator, she was only counted once in the total.

Source: Women's Safety, Australia (4128.0).

Women were more likely to report incidents in which they were injured. Of women who were injured in the last incident of physical assault experienced since the age of 15, 29% reported the incident to the police compared to 10% who were not injured. The pattern was similar for incidents of sexual assault.

About 40% of women who experienced a physical assault by a man since the age of 15, said that the main reason for not telling the police was because they had dealt with the incident themselves. Almost one-quarter of women who were physically assaulted and 14% of those sexually assaulted did not contact the police because they did not consider it a serious offence. Of those who were sexually assaulted, 12% said they did not report the last incident to the police because they were ashamed or embarrassed.

Once an incident is reported to the police there is the possibility that the perpetrator will be charged and consequently appear in court. 28% of incidents of physical assault reported to the police and 22% of incidents of sexual assault resulted in the perpetrator being charged.

Of women who reported in the survey that they had experienced an incident of violence by a man since the age of 15, 18% (267,100) who were physically assaulted and 22% (170,800) who were sexually assaulted had never told anybody about the last incident, prior to the survey.

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